

65-1539

24 March 1965

MEMORANDUM FOR:

and
The Honorable McGeorge Bundy
Special Assistant to the President
for National Security Affairs

Mr. McCone asked that the attached memorandum be brought to your personal attention.

/s/

WALTER ELDER
Executive Assistant

Attachment: OCI Memo No. 0789/65 dated 24 Mar 65
Subject: Monsoon Weather in Indochina

Copy to: The Secretary of State
The Secretary of Defense
The Assistant Secretary of State
for Far Eastern Affairs

WElder:MMW (24Mar65)

Orig - Addressee w/a
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2cc - ER

White House

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24 March 1965

OCI No. 0789/65

Copy No. 5

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

MONSOON WEATHER IN INDOCHINA

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

Office of Current Intelligence

GROUP 1
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W A R N I N G

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OCI No. 0789/65

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Office of Current Intelligence
24 March 1965

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

Monsoon Weather in Indochina

1. General Conditions. During the coming nine months, military operations in South Vietnam will be affected by two major monsoon periods which are characterized by heavy rains and extensive cloud cover. The heaviest rains occur during the Southwest Monsoon which prevails from mid-May through mid-October. In this period the rains fall mainly in areas south of the Bassac River in the Delta region. Also affected are the exposed slopes of the interior highlands, a vast arc that includes the whole area north of Saigon except for two relatively narrow strips of coastal lowlands. The Northeast Monsoon brings heavy rainfall mainly to the eastern coastlands--from the Demarcation Line to Nha Trang--during the period mid-November through February. Other regions of South Vietnam receive precipitation either in association with the passing of the monsoons or because of special local conditions.

2. Ground Operations. While there is no evidence to show that the Viet Cong make greater territorial gains while operating during the monsoons, the monsoons clearly have less effect on their ability to conduct operations than on the more mechanized ARVN. Being essentially a light infantry force, not burdened as is the ARVN by heavy road-bound equipment, the Viet Cong remain able to make rapid and stealthy movements cross-country and to regroup to attack when and where they choose. General ARVN operational activity is not only slowed by the monsoon rains, but the ARVN's ability to react in force to Viet Cong thrusts is impaired as deteriorating road conditions restrict its ability to move trucks, artillery and APC's.

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3. Air Operations. In addition to hampering government ground operations, the monsoons severely restrict the ability of the government to mount air operations. The ARVN has come to depend more and more on US and their own air to provide tactical support in the form of fire-power, maneuver, and mobility, as well as aerial resupply. Moreover, as the Viet Cong continue to cut communications between district town and provincial capitals, there is an increasing reliance upon the airlift of supplies to support these outposts.

4. Dien Bien Phu. Weather conditions at the battle of Dien Bien Phu (November 1953 - May 1954) do not appear to have been a decisive factor in the defeat of the French on the ground. Adverse weather hampered aerial resupply of the outpost and also tactical air support. Weather also affected air operations at Hanoi, the supply base of the French forces, where rain and fog of the crachin period (early January through April) as well as the heavy rains of the Northeast Monsoon were encountered.

5. Effects of weather in the Laotian corridor area. The next nine months in the Laotian "corridor" will be dominated by the rainy monsoon. These rains, lasting roughly from late May until early October, very likely will have the effect of making overland truck movement almost impossible on the complex of roads leading from North Vietnam through eastern Laos to the South Vietnamese border regions.

6. The key link in this road network is the portion of Route 23, which connects Route 12 (in the Mu Gia Pass area) with Route 9, about 70 miles to the south. Last year, this part of Route 23 became impassable to truck traffic in late May - early June, and no further traffic was observed until mid-December. The year before, the route had been reopened in mid-November.

7. Until the onset of the wet monsoon, however, heavy traffic is likely to continue from North Vietnam through the corridor area to staging areas in southern Laos (the Muong Phine - Tchepone - Muong Nong area along Route 9). Since 1 January, over 700 trucks have been spotted moving south along Route 23, an average of about 10 per day.

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8. Although truck use of the corridor is likely to be curtailed with the advent of the rainy season, movement by foot probably will be only slightly reduced. The principal infiltration route for troops originates in North Vietnam just north of the 17th parallel, crosses over into Laos, and leads south along the border. The heavy monsoonal rains, although undoubtedly making travel more difficult, are unlikely seriously to hamper such movement. (Map)

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